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Pen Pictures of Prophets

By GERHARD LENSKI

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Brief studies in the lives of certain men who were once sent of God to tell the people of their day the things that God wanted them to know

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I. HOSEAH.

The tragedy of whose life is a commenteary on the nature of vicarious sacrifice.

II. ISAIAH.

Who saw with clear eyes the suffering Savior who was to come.

III. JEREMIAH.

To whom was accorded a remarkable insight into the thought and working of the human heart.

IV. EZEKIEL.

A young man who was not dismayed by the objections of the wiseacres of his day.

V. DANIEL.

Another young man whose prophetic word is a blessed promise for the church of tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

IT has been the aim of the writer of these discourses to present in summary some of the personal characteristics of the prophets Hoseah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel as those characteristics are to be noted in a study of the messages these men brought to the world.

How easily do the names of these prophets sometimes flow from our lips! How little do we really know about these men who were God's own spokesmen on earth! Can we not by searching and study find enough facts and details that we may put them together and produce such a likeness of these men that the repeating of their names will bring a distinct and vivid picture to our minds? It is this that the writer has tried to do.

These discourses do not aim to discuss in any critical manner any of the problems

involving the composition or interpretation of the writings of these prophets. They make no effort to explain the mystery of prophecy or to point out the unique character of the Messianic prophecies. They are intended to be pictures of men of flesh and blood who were once sent of God to tell the people of their day the things that God wanted them to know. If they are taken for what they are intended to be they will be the more easily understood and perhaps the less severely criticised. Originally these discourses were used as sermons. If they will help someone else to preach a sermon their fullest and freest use is granted. If some Bible student finds anything helpful in them the writer will be highly complimented.

THE AUTHOR.

I. Hoseah

HOSEAH

THE TRAGEDY OF WHOSE LIFE IS A COMMENTARY ON THE NATURE OF VICARIOUS SACRIFICE

"So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and half an homer of barley." — HOSEAH 3, 2.

IN has been sin since the memory of man — the deadliest disease that has fastened itself upon the human race. The mystery that surrounds it is exceeded only by the sorrow that it has caused. Quite plainly its cure does not lie within the unaided power of man. Unless God Himself should stoop down to provide the remedy there is no sinner that ever could dare to hope.

The life and the activity of the prophet Hoseah is a revelation of the heart of God in its thought toward those whom sin has cast down. In the tragedy that attends the life of this man we have a concrete example

of the patience of the Almighty in His dealings with the wayward children of men. Here we see clearly what we sometimes see but dimly in our own human experience, the love of God, how great it is, how it endures even to the end, how it sacrifices to the utmost for the object of its affection, how when all seems lost it cries aloud as the tender parent calling for the child and saying: "O Ephraim, my son, how can I give thee up! My heart is turned within me. How can I let thee go!"

There are some people with learned pretensions who seem to take a malicious delight in discounting for us the value of the Bible, especially great portions of the Old Testament. "There is no mercy, no forgiveness, no Christian charity in the Old Testament," these critics declare. "Does not the law demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Look how ruthlessly David slays his enemies! Look how God's people time after time destroy even women and little children! Who wants a religion

like that or a book that teaches it!" Such critics are short-sighted. They see only a small part of a great whole and they see that little awry in distorted fashion. They do not know the story of Hoseah and its message of forgiving love. They do not know how Hoseah eight centuries before Christ reveals God as one who loves His earthly children so much that instead of telling them to kill one another as they sometimes delight to do He comes to them to teach them that God Himself is willing to die in order that they may be saved from the curse and power of sin.

There are some people today who do not mean to do so but who nevertheless are very successfully discounting the Bible for us by impugning the love and the justice of God in the exceedingly difficult matter of sin. "How can a just God permit the iniquities that flourish on the earth?" these people ask. "Why is God not responsible for sin if being able to do so He does not stop sin?" Such people may be sincere in their ques-

tionings but certainly they are short-sighted in their views. They need to read and to know the story of the prophet Hoseah. They need to see the uplifted cross which he reveals. They need to learn from this man the real facts in the case, that the love of God is still what it ever was, the one redemptive force in the world that always and everywhere is saving the souls of sinful men from the destruction that their own wrongdoing has invited upon them.

I

The story of Hoseah, for the book of Hoseah is a story even before it is a prophecy, is first of all a story of tragedy.

The tragedy that stalked one day all unbidden and unexpected into the home of Hoseah was one of the cruelest imaginable. Moved by a love that must have been pure and clean and strong Hoseah had taken unto himself a wife. Her name was Gomer. There is every indication that from the beginning she was not what she should have

been in matters moral. Quite plainly Hoseah at first did not fully realize what this was to mean for him. Very soon, however, he found out. Very soon he knew that her love for him was mockery pure and simple, that their marriage was a joke, that her heart was not in their common home but out on the streets where walked strange men, her lovers and paramours of former days.

In most cases of conjugal infidelity is it not the man rather than the woman who precipitates the trouble? In this case Hoseah was as good as Gomer, his wife, was bad. Not only once or twice did this woman take advantage of her husband's patience and goodness. She was habitually untrue to him. Again and again did she sell herself, body and soul and honor, until at last she was compelled to leave her husband and her children to go forth upon the city streets to flaunt her shame openly and brazenly before the curious gaze of the world. Please imagine, if you can, the mental anguish all this must have brought

to the mind of this man whose home had been the seat of his truest happiness and whose wife had been the object of his deepest, purest affection!

The domestic tragedy that came unbidden into the home of Hoseah, as dark and as terrible as it is, serves to throw a clear light on the perplexing problem of sin. Unthinking and short-sighted people sometimes impugn the love and justice of God because sin is so cruel, because it seems to run rampant in the world and because sinners seem to flourish like green bay trees in well watered fields. "How can a loving God permit a wicked woman like Gomer to bring her sin into the the home?" these people inquire. "Think of her husband! Think of her innocent children! Why did God ever allow her to be born in the first place? Why did He not strike her down before she had spread sorrow and desolation everywhere?" The tragedy that wrecked the happiness and the home of Hoseah answers these questions by telling us very plainly

that sin is the result of human perversity, that God does not desire it, that He does not endorse it, that He does not sanction it, but that He is continually and everywhere seeking to overrule it and to turn its evil into good.

Why was the wicked woman Gomer what she was? Why did she choose evil when the good was so close at hand? Why did she deceive her husband so cruelly and make his home a hell instead of a heaven on earth? Gomer was what she was because of the perversity of her own heart and nature. There was no outward compulsion of any kind put upon her to make her do as she did. Quite the contrary was the case. There was every earthly reason for her leading an honorable life and yet despite all, she insisted on doing evil. Read those first chapters of the book of Hoseah. You cannot escape the conclusion that this woman went wrong for but one reason — because she wanted to go wrong, because in her heart she loved darkness rather than light. Yes,

and if you read introspectively, that is with a thought upon your own heart and life, you will not be able to escape another conclusion, namely that you yourself have sinned and now are sinning for but one reason — not because you must — but solely because like Gomer of old in your heart you desire and will to sin.

Why did God ever ask a pure-minded man like Hoseah to marry a woman so impure as this woman Gomer? Why did God ever call upon an honorable man to endure the shame and the disgrace that this woman heaped upon him? The answer is easy. Hoseah was God's call to the conscience of rebellious Gomer. God loves the sinner so much, even the despised prostitute of the streets, that He will not allow her to go her way to hell without giving her some chance to be saved. God calls sinners in many ways. One of the commonest and most effective ways that He employs is to send some noble life to shed its influence over our own. A good husband is God's call to a

giddy wife. A faithful father is God's call to a disobedient son. A bold preacher is God's call to a crowd of lazy Christians. A believing Sunday School teacher is God's call to an undisciplined youth and a careless maid. We may be slow to realize it, but just as He once called Gomer of old through the patience and goodness of Hoseah, so God still calls us, one and all, through the influence of noble, Christ-like lives round about us everywhere.

Do you have a friend, faithful and true, a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a teacher, a preacher, someone whose wish and desire for you is that you turn from the ways of evil to do the will of God? Then, please, please, do not impugn the love and the justice of God by asking such questions as: "Why doesn't God stop sin?" He is stopping it. He is giving you some of the strongest reasons in all this world for stopping it. If you do not respect those reasons then you and not He is to be blamed. Read the book of the prophet Hoseah, dear friend,

and learn this lesson which you have need to know.

II

The story of Hoseah is secondly a revelation of the patience of God in His dealings with the wayward children of men.

When Gomer left the household of Hoseah to become a woman of the streets she exchanged the comforts of a happy home for a bed in the gutter. It was not long until she was reduced to the very depths of misery. So degraded and despicable did she become that her paramour who once praised her beauty cast her off in loathing and disgust. With none to support her, with none to buy what she had to sell, what was she to do? She was soon exposed in the market-place to be sold as a slave to satisfy the claims of her creditors. Alas, for the disillusionments and disappointments of sin! So poor and miserable had she become that there was none to have her at any price. It was in this crisis that Hoseah, her outraged husband of former days, came

forward to pay the price of her redemption, to buy her back from those who had a claim upon her, to take her back to the old home again and to give her a chance to remake her miserable, misspent life.

What is the duty of a husband toward a wife who has proven untrue? What is the duty of a wife toward a husband who has shown himself faithless and recreant? I am convinced that there is not a single court in our land but what would decree that flagrant adultery such as Gomer committed was sufficient grounds for unconditional and absolute divorce. Only fancy yourself in Hoseah's place dealing with a woman like Gomer. Would you not turn upon her and say to her with all the severity of your outraged innocency: "Get you gone, you faithless creature and never darken my door again"? This thing that you would do, this thing that I would do, this thing that men so often do, this, mark you, is not the thing that the man Hoseah does. Behold the goodness of this man, paying the creditors who

have a claim upon this woman, seeking to rekindle the flame of love upon the ashes of the past, taking her to his home — to shield her — to save her, if happily he may—from the shame that has ruined her life and blighted his!

The goodness of Hoseah in this matter is a picture, a prophecy, a revelation of the goodness of God in His thought and feeling toward the children of men.

As Hoseah has given himself in marriage to Gomer so God has plighted His troth with Israel. He has selected her to be His own out of many nations. He has loved her, blessed her, kept her. With what result? As Gomer has been untrue to Hoseah, so Israel has been untrue to God. She has deceived Him, abused His patience, despised His love. Now trouble is at hand for her. Dangerous enemies threaten the land. Judgment is near. Israel must now pay the price of her folly. Who is it that will help her now when all other helpers have turned away? Who is it that will re-

deem her, restore her, crown her with honor again? Who, but the same God of goodness and patience who has loved her from the beginning and has refused to give her up during the long years of her cruel disobedience! This love, this patience, this goodness Israel is to see prefigured in the conduct of Hoseah and it shall be for her a message of hope in the land of her doom.

The patience of Hoseah in his dealings with Gomer is more than a promise of forgiveness for rebellious Israel. It is a direct prophecy of the Christ to come whose heart is love and in whose hand there is mercy and forgiveness for every repenting sinner.

On a certain spring morning, centuries after this prophecy has been given, comes its fulfillment. A crowd of would-be righteous men bring to the patient Jesus a miserable specimen of fallen womanhood. "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. The law of Moses commands that such shall be stoned to death. What sayest Thou?" When they become insistent for

their answer He replies in measured words: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her." Then when they slink away in self-convicted shame He turns to her. "Woman, where are thine accusers? Is there none to condemn thee?" She replies: "None, Lord." He answers: "Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way and sin no more."

The love of Christ, the patience of Christ, the mercy of Christ are the sinner's sole hope. What you would not do, what I would not do, what men do not do—that the patient Christ does for us. He reaches His hand to us. He lifts us out of the dust. He says: "Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way and sin no more." This love, this patience, this mercy, prophsied in Hoseah, fulfilled in Christ is God's message of hope to the sinner in the land of doom. God help us today to receive and to believe it for what it is.

III

The story of Hoseah is a revelation of the nature of sin. It is prophecy concerning the goodness of Christ. It is finally and most fully a commentary on the nature of vicarious sacrifice.

The man Hoseah redeemed his wife by sacrificing himself. It is quite plain that Gomer would not have been restored if Hoseah had not done for her what he did. It was not a small price that he paid for her deliverance. The fact that he was misunderstood by the people of his day, the fact that they abused him and called him a fool and even persecuted him is to be inferred from various utterances in his book. Add all this to the mental anguish that he must have endured and you have a glorious example of sacrifice, a glorious example of a man sacrificing himself for the sole purpose of serving and saving someone else.

The conduct of Hoseah is a commentary on the nature of vicarious sacrifice. How shall the man in the gutter ever be helped

to his feet? How shall the woman of the streets ever be reclaimed for a useful life in the home? There is but one way and Hoseah points us to that way. Some one must sacrifice himself for these. Someone must agonize and labor and pray for these. Someone must endure pain and shame and blame. You can't save sinners by sitting at home and taking your ease or by riding about in soft-cushioned limousines. You can only save sinners when you are willing to pay the price, when you are willing to sacrifice your comfort, your money, your good name, your life itself! As one of our poets has well said:

"For all through life I see a cross,
Where sons of God yield up their breath;
There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death."

In the light of the life and the message of Hoseah the cross of Christ should take on a newer, clearer, deeper meaning for us. One man can lift another up only by stoop-

ing down himself. One man can save another from danger only by exposing and risking his own. The love of God, even more so than the purest human love, is vicarious in the same way. God can lift us up only by stooping down to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. God can save us from death only by shedding His own blood on the cross of Calvary. We may not be able to explain Calvary for all that it was and for all that it does—but does not the eternal principle that underlies it — the law of love as the law of sacrifice — in the light of the prophecy of Hoseah become as clear to the mind as the mourning sunlight to the eye?

In ancient mythology the most beautiful home story of all is that which tells of the love of Penelope for her husband Ulysses. For years and years Penelope watches and waits for the return of Ulysses who is traveling in distant lands. Many suitors come to tell her that her husband is either faithless or dead and that she should marry

one of them. In spite of splendid inducements Penelope continues true. She watches and waits until patience at last receives its reward and the empty home is crowned again with the love of her returned husband.

A more beautiful story than that of the love of Penelope, a story that sounds deeper depths and that rises to higher glories, is the story of Hoseah who loved his betrothed wife on the day of their marriage, who loved her on the day of her deepest disgrace, who loved her unto the end until his love finally worked penitence in her guilty heart and led her back, a redeemed wife into a new home of happiness.

Let us change this story and make it even more beautiful still. Instead of Hoseah let us write into it the name of Him who is the lover of our souls, Jesus Christ, the Savior. Instead of Gomer let us write your name and mine. Instead of a market-place where slaves are bought and sold let us think of a cross and on that cross the Son of God, paying the price of sinful man's redemption.

Instead of an earthly home of happiness where a reconciled husband and wife meet again, let us think of that heaven beyond where God and His redeemed children shall be gathered together in perfect peace and unbroken happiness. Let us think of these things if we can. Is not this the most glorious tale ever told on earth?

II. Isaiah

ISAIAH

WHO SAW WITH CLEAR EYES THE SUFFERING SAVIOR WHO WAS TO COME

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." — ISAIAH 1, 18.

GOD'S way of dealing with bad people will be found upon investigation to be very much the same in every age. It is not God's will that any individual should destroy himself through persistent wrongdoing. Much less is it His will that any nation should do evil and thereby come to destruction. In order that these things may not come to pass God continually raises up barriers to man's wickedness. He not only makes the path of the transgressor hard. He makes it hard for a man ever to become a transgressor in the first place. He remonstrates with man through the medium of

conscience. He sends noble men and true to him to reveal to him the will of God and to plead with him to repent and to say to him: "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Does God deal with us thus as with bad people? He most certainly does. You may not have realized it, but when your mother first advised you and your father first corrected you God Himself was dealing with you and striving to lead your soul along the paths of light and glory. You may not have realized it, but when your teachers insisted that you learn certain truths and lessons God Himself was dealing with you and training you up for high and holy things. You may not have realized it, but when the preached Word gripped your heart and set your conscience aflame God was calling you through His Holy Spirit even as He calls, gathers and enlightens His true children

everywhere. "New occasions teach new duties and time makes ancient good uncouth," says the poet. In the all-important matter time does not make ancient good uncouth. Down through all the ages of time the heart of God toward His wayward children is ever the same. It is a heart of yearning love. It is a heart which cries aloud like the parent that calls to the child and says: "O Ephraim, my son, how can I give thee up! My heart is turned within me. How can I let thee go!"

One of the clearest efforts on the part of God to reason with a wayward nation and to save its people from the curse of sin is to be seen in the life and activity of the prophet Isaiah. Sometimes God's dealings with us are brought about in such natural ways that we fail to see His hand behind them at all. A good illustration of this might be God's calling Israel through the patience of Hoseah in his dealings with his faithless wife Gomer. In the work of the prophet Isaiah, however, we have the

natural mingled with the supernatural in a manner so conspicuous that it disarms all the doubt of the worst sceptic, confirms the hope of the faithful and brings the true child of God to his knees to cry aloud: "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." Do we want testimony and proof that God is indeed a God of love desiring the salvation of all men? We have that testimony and proof in the prophecies of Isaiah, confirmed as they are in the sacrificial life of Christ, so convincingly clear that only a blind man will fail to see them and only a fool will fail to accept them for what they are.

I

Concerning the personal life of the prophet Isaiah we know exceedingly little. His prophetic ministry is supposed to have filled the years somewhere between 740 and 680 B. C. The scene of his life's activity was the city of Jerusalem. He was a married man. He had two sons. A tradition

not so very well substantiated says that he suffered martyrdom having been "sawn asunder with a wooden saw." Strange indeed it is that we should know scarcely anything more than this about this man who must have been one of the outstanding characters of his day. Stranger still that this man should have written one of the greatest books of the Bible, a book that shall live for all time, and that he should have managed to have hidden himself behind such a veil of obscurity that critics are still in doubt as to whether he was one man or two or perhaps several men.

Isaiah's self-imposed obscurity is one of Isaiah's chiefest glories if we but have the faith to see it so. From the beginning even to the end of his book it is plain that this man is exalting not himself but the righteousness and the love of God. He is advertising not Isaiah as a famous teacher and preacher and Chautauqua lecturer but Jesus Christ as the light of men and the hope of the world. His modesty in this matter is

peculiarly conspicuous. It is so beautifully done, this self-effacement of the man in favor of the message that he brings, that we cannot help but think that Isaiah was in very truth heaven-endowed and heaven-sent.

The modesty of Isaiah rebukes the boldness of some today who love to advertise themselves as the oracles of God and thereby to win great name and fame for themselves. Goodness does not need to wear a label to tell the world what it is. Let goodness go ahead being good and even bad men will not be able to misunderstand. Charity does not need to sound a trumpet in the streets and to say: "Behold, 'tis I, sweet-faced charity!" Let charity continue to do the works of her Lord and she shall abide forever according to His promise. Newspaper advertising is undoubtedly a good thing for the church. When, however, church advertising aims to display the greatness of the oratory of some preacher rather than the goodness of the Christ who died then the thing becomes an abomination in the sight

of heaven. The best servants that God has been able to find among the children of men have been anything but self-advertisers and notoriety seekers. They did not put their picture in the Jerusalem press every time they preached an especially good sermon. They did their work, they bore witness to the truth, they hid themselves behind such a veil of obscurity that they themselves were not seen while men were the better able to behold Him who is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Shall not Christ's present day disciples learn here a very simple lesson in Christian humility that will enhance not a little the good work they are striving to do?

II

The period of history into which the ministry of Isaiah falls has been called the period of national degeneracy. It could more appropriately be called the period of international degeneracy.

For some time degeneracy and decay had been apparent in the northern kingdom, Israel. Most of the nineteen kings who had occupied the throne since the division of the kingdom had been bad men. More rich and fertile than Judah to the southward, Israel was more bothered with wars, rebellions and dissensions than her poorer but more virtuous neighbor.

Even though Judah for many years had been well ruled by wise and virtuous kings still corruption and decay had taken strong hold on the land. Silently, slowly, surely the poison had been seeping through the veins and arteries of her national life. The nearness of an evil people—and Judah was surrounded by evil people—is as dangerous to the welfare of a nation as a malarial swamp is to the health of the family that lives on its border. What is that homely proverb about the bad apple that makes the good apples bad? It was identically so with Judah in her close proximity to degenerate Israel. Israel's rottenness was fast becom-

ing her rottenness. Israel's ruin was soon to become her ruin. The man who saw the danger more clearly than anyone else was the prophet Isaiah.

What were the signs of degeneracy that Isaiah saw in Judah that made him a prophet of judgment against her? As those who love our own land and who seek to protect her from threatening danger let us look and see. The signs of Judah's degeneracy, as Isaiah has indicated them, may be given as three:

First, formalism or dead orthodoxy in religion.

Second, the decline of morality, especially of feminine morality.

Third, the inordinate desire on the part of the people for luxury, pleasure and ease.

Religion is the life blood of a nation. Religion is the cement that holds the stones of national life together. Religion is the salt that gives life its savor and that saves it from corruption and decay. Religion at this time in Judah was fast drifting into

formalism and dead orthodoxy. Men thought they could go through the motions of religion and get its blessings without putting heart and soul into what they did. They made their religious observances a sop to appease their sin-laden consciences. Just as in the days preceding the Protestant Reformation they trusted in rites and ceremonies to save them from the sin which they did not intend to give up. Like Augustine in the days of his youth they prayed and said: "Lord, make me pure—but not just yet for a while!" Is it any wonder that Isaiah, seeing their mock-piety and childish hypocrisies, should flare forth in words of burning wrath and should tell them that God was utterly disgusted with them and that He would soon wipe them off the face of the earth if they did not repent?

Womanly virtue has been said to be the barometer by which the morality of a nation may be measured. Certain it is, no nation is any stronger than its women are virtuous. In a peculiar way God has made womankind

the custodians of the morals of the nation and thus responsible for the nation's welfare. In a way that the man cannot do it the woman can inspire high and holy living in those round about her. In a way that the man cannot do it the woman, if she so wills, can spread the poison of impurity wherever she cares to go. When the woman uses her beauty for no higher purposes than to arouse and to enflame the sinful passions of the man, then how soon is the land filled with corruption and ruin and destruction come upon all! In Judah at this time women were using their beauty simply to lead the rest of the race astray. Jerusalem was filled with evil women of the most dangerous type. It was a situation somewhat analogous to that one that existed in Rome in those palmy days of vice that preceded her fall. The chief difference was that Judah had an Isaiah who cried out aloud against these feminine enemies of the state while Rome had no such prophet to speak to her conscience.

Wealth has been said to be the source of a nation's strength. Perhaps it is if it is used for high and holy purposes and carefully administered by those whose hearts are right toward God. Most often these circumstances do not exist and wealth, instead of becoming a nation's strength, becomes its weakness and ruination. How easily do the words of Goldsmith come to mind:

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

Exactly this situation existed in Judah. Wealth was piling up but the morals of men were slipping down. Men were living in ease and luxury and they were finding the Ten Commandments more and more a nuisance. Isaiah saw what it all meant. He saw the sword of judgment hanging over the head of the nation and suspended by a single hair. Listen to his terrible words! "Woe unto them that rise up early in the

morning that they may follow strong drink until night until wine enflame them. They regard not the work of the Lord nor the operation of His hands. Therefore hath hell enlarged herself and hath opened her mouth without measure; and their glory and their multitude and their pomp shall descend into it."

Out in the forest the mighty oak comes crashing to the ground. The mighty oak falls, not because the storms that sweep over it are too strong, but because the tree itself is rotten and weak within. In the same way Isaiah beheld Judah, a mighty tree falling to the ground, not because the storms that raged about her were too violent, but solely because she was weak and rotten within.

Shall we not stop here long enough to ask a question? If dead orthodoxy, feminine immorality and inordinate luxury destroyed Israel and Judah of old, what assurance do we have that these same sins, if encouraged, will not also destroy America today?

III

As few men in the history of the world have seen it Isaiah saw the hand of God in the affairs of men. He saw how God uses one nation to punish another. He saw how God brings order out of chaos in strange, incomprehensible ways. He saw how the strongest nation is bound to go down in ruin if it persists in wickedness and how the weakest nation cannot be overthrown so long as it has the Almighty for its ally. These things Isaiah saw with such clearness that even the unbeliever must look with wonder and astonishment upon the accuracy and boldness of some of his prophecies concerning them.

Let us recount one such. In order to protect herself against the oncoming army of Syria Judah had formed an alliance with Assyria—all contrary to the wish of the prophet who desired that Judah should seek her strength in a closer union with God rather than in any alliance with a heathen nation. This union did save Judah — but

only for a time. Soon the people came to hate the Assyrians and to desire to break away from them. Again the prophet objected, for he knew the strength of Assyria and the weakness of Judah. His objections were overruled and soon an Assyrian army was encamped round about Jerusalem and the city was in grave danger of being destroyed just as the prophet had warningly declared. What should be done? The people turn to the prophet. He comes forward with the remarkable declaration that as strong as the Assyrians are they shall not be able to take the city. His prophecy is carried out to the letter as no one expects it to be fulfilled. When the people look forth upon the camp of the Assyrians they find that no less than 185,000 of them lie dead in their tents, smitten by a deadly disease, while the rest of them have fled away in greatest fear. It is a glorious triumph for the prophet in the face of direst opposition. It is positive proof that the prophet is who he says he is—God's own spokesman

and servant in the midst of a faithless and unbelieving people.

The lesson that Isaiah sought to teach Judah is the same lesson that God has been trying to teach the world ever since. The strongest nation is doomed to destruction if it persists in wickedness while the weakest nation cannot be overthrown if it makes the Almighty its God and ally. God is not on the side that has the greatest battalions, but He is on the side that is most concerned to do His holy will. Battleships, machine-guns and regiments of soldiers—these alone will never save any nation — behold the Assyrians, 185,000 of them, dead in their tents, while the walls of the Holy City still stand intact! Faith, hope and love—these endure, these make a nation strong, these make the weakest nation so strong that the strongest cannot overthrow it. It is the old, old lesson that Isaiah taught the people of Judah, but, oh, how slow this world is to learn it and what a fearful price we pay until we do!

During the dark days of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, so the story goes, happened into a church service at which the minister was very solicitous to pray the Lord to be on "our side" and to give the victory to "our side." After the service was over, Lincoln said to his companion: "As for me I have learned to ask but one thing of the Lord—not that He may be on our side but that I may be on His side." To be on the Lord's side is to be on the right, the safe side, the winning side in the end. To be on the Lord's side should be a nation's first concern — not the building of bigger and bigger battleship. When will America learn this, one of the simplest lessons that history has to teach?

IV

The name of the prophet Isaiah will ever be precious in the memory of Christian people because of its close association with the Christ of Calvary. Any discussion of this prophet is incomplete without some consideration of the remarkable prophecy that

he has given concerning the suffering Savior in the 53rd chapter of his book. So wonderful is it in power of description and in pathos, so supernatural is it in its minute foretelling of events and details, so satisfying is it to the sin-laden soul seeking forgiveness at the mercy seat that five complete lectures, much less a small part of one, would not begin to do justice to its mystery and its glory.

Isaiah looked into the future with a clear eye and he saw nothing but ruin ahead for rebellious Judah. At the same time he saw amid impending ruin salvation full and free for all who might believe in the Christ to come. Isaiah saw Christ from afar and he saw Him above all else as the One, the only One mighty to save. He saw His perfect righteousness as a spotless robe covering all the imperfections of sinful man. He saw His perfect sacrifice as an eternal satisfaction, pleasing and acceptable to a God of perfect justice and holiness. He saw the believer by faith laying hold of the blessed

truth how "He bare the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" and in that truth finding forgiveness, peace of conscience and hope of life eternal. In his clear words concerning the Christ who saves Isaiah transcends all other prophets of God and as none other of his companions does, he leads the soul to the very gates of heaven itself.

In the Dresden art gallery hangs Raphael's Sistine Madonna, said by many critics to be the most beautiful picture ever painted. It has been frequently observed that visitors on beholding this likeness of Christ in His mother's arms invariably remove their hats and stop their conversation and halt in an attitude of reverence and devotion. Better far than Raphael's picture of Christ and more compelling of devotion and of living faith is the picture that Isaiah has given us of the suffering Savior in the prophecy of his book. Where in all the realm of art is there any picture to match that one that Isaiah gives when he speaks

of Him who for our sins was crucified and says:

"He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted!"

It is said of the great musician Handel that a servant suddenly coming into his room once found his master with his face buried in hands, weeping bitterly, and the Bible open before him at the 53rd chapter of the book of Isaiah. When we think of the beauty of Handel's oratorio "The Messiah" we can readily believe that the story is true. Why is our devotion to the Christ who died so lifeless and spiritless and cold? Is not one reason to be found in this that we have been too busy to read our Bibles and to study that matchless picture of the suffering Savior which Isaiah has given us?

III. Jeremiah

JEREMIAH

TO WHOM WAS ACCORDED A REMARKABLE INSIGHT INTO THE THOUGHT AND WORKING OF THE HUMAN HEART

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" — JEREMIAH 13, 23.

HERE are many uncrowned heroes in the Old Testament. First among them all, it seems to me, we might very well place the prophet Jeremiah.

If there is one man in the Bible to whom history has not given his rightful due certainly it is this man. To have written one of the longest and best books of the Bible, to have lived a life that was conspicuously Christlike in its holiness and helpfulness, to have suffered martyrdom at the hands of the very people whom he lived to serve, then to be disregarded and criticised and belittled and sneered at by succeeding generations—is not this the very heart of unfair-

ness, the very essence of the gall of human bitterness?

About all the average person knows about the prophet Jeremiah is his name. Some few there are who know that he was a sad and sorrowful man and that he is supposed to have shed many tears and to have written a book called "Lamentations." Some who ought to know better have been the very ones to settle such superficial conceptions in the minds of the shallow-brained. No less a person than Michael Angelo, the greatest of all sculptors, in his representation of Jeremiah has depicted this man as sad and downcast, as though the sorrow of Jeremiah were the chief thing in his life beside which all other details must sink away into utter insignificance—a representation which is as untrue as it is unfair to the memory of the man. In his paintings of the prophets, recently placed in the Boston Public Library, the great painter Sargent presents Isaiah to us as a young, strong and virile man. Ezekiel is seen gazing into space with an en-

raptured expression on his face. Other prophets are shown in attitudes highly complimentary to their calling and their character. What does the painter do for Jeremiah? He makes him the saddest and the sickliest of the prophetic band. He makes him so old, so weak, so tearful, so miserable that we are either overwhelmed with sorrow and sympathy or repelled in disgust at the sight of his utter helplessness. To all of which I would say—let those who know Jeremiah thus and only thus be afraid to open their mouths to speak lest they betray their ignorance, for one thing is certain—they know but little concerning this man who was one of God's greatest prophets, one of His noblest servants, one of the bravest and best men that ever walked the fields of earth.

I

The sorrow of Jeremiah, while it is by no means the biggest thing in his life, does play an exceedingly conspicuous part in his prophetic activity.

Jeremiah lived in the seventh century before Christ. He is supposed to have begun his public ministry in the year 627, in the city of Jerusalem, under the reign of the righteous king Josiah. For forty years he lived and labored. For the sake of the work that God had appointed him to do he separated himself from his home and his friends, he refrained from marriage, he gave up all the comforts and the luxuries of life, he sacrificed himself both figuratively and literally for the good of others.

Never was there a time when a good man was more needed in the affairs of a sick nation than when Jeremiah answered the call of God and appeared on the scene in the kingdom of Judah. Through the prophet Isaiah God had warned the people against the sin that was threatening the life of the nation. The people had heard but they had not heeded. Just as Cleopatra once ensnared Antony with her wiles and devices so the sins of Egypt and the East had laid firm hold on the hearts of the children of

Israel. One prophet — a prince among prophets—even the prophet Isaiah—had not been able to turn them aside from the error of their way. Now God calls to them once again—for the last time—through the ministry of the weeping prophet Jeremiah. With what result?

For forty years Jeremiah labors with and for these people. For forty years he strives to show their leaders the folly of an alliance with Egypt and the necessity of a closer union with God. For forty years he pleads with the people to repent and to turn to the ways of righteousness. For forty years he rebukes the idolatry, the indecency and the corruption everywhere prevalent. It is all in vain. Forty years pass — the same number of years that elapse between Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and Jerusalem laid in ruins with not one stone left standing on another. Forty years — and now the ministry of the prophet is at an end, the country is worse off than before and ruin is more sure and certain. Is it any wonder that

under such circumstances this man should weep? Is it any wonder that seeing the failure of his ministry and the terrible destruction soon to come, he should cry aloud and say: "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

If there is one thing worse for a man to do than to weep when he might laugh it is for him to laugh when he ought to weep. To weep amid a crowd of merry-makers is perhaps a breach of etiquette and bad manners. To laugh at a funeral and to joke in the presence of the dying is unpardonable and inexcusable. It is good to be cheerful and optimistic. There are, however, some decided limitations to cheerfulness and optimism. The man who insists on being cheerful when a snake is crushing out the life of his child is either criminal or crazy. The man who smiles when sin like a cancer is eating out the heart and the life of a great nation is either a fool or else he is cruel

beyond words. If Christ wept to see the destruction that was soon to come upon Jerusalem what can there possibly be amiss in the tears that Jeremiah sheds as he looks into the coming years and sees the slain of the daughters of his people and the widespread devastation that is to descend upon the land?

One thing that many people admire in Christian Science, one thing that truly intelligent people ought to despise in this new faith is its silly and superficial optimism. To tell a sick and dying man that he is not sick at all, that he does not even feel badly — how dishonest and how unfair! To whisper "Peace, peace!" into the ears of a pleasure-loving people when the enemy is already knocking at the city gate is to betray that people into the hands of ruin. To come to a man with a religion of toilet-water and scented soap when he needs to be fumigated and sterilized for adultery and uncleanness is to destroy that man's soul and to make yourself partner in his damnation. We have

plenty of prophets today who come to us with smooth words to tell us that we are not such bad people as ye thought we were, that if we will only cheer up and smile and smile and smile things will come out all right in the end. May God Almighty look in mercy upon us. May He deliver us from the hands of these false prophets. May He send His prophet Jeremiah to us, to teach us to weep over sin and to repent of it before it shall grow strong and destroy us as it did Judah of old.

II

The tears of Jeremiah are not signs of weakness in the man. They are rather the evidence of a keen insight into the hearts of his people and of his realization of their need of repentance and inward cleansing. As few men in the history of the world have understood the human heart this man understood it and prescribed for it the things that it needed.

Early in the public ministry of Jeremiah an incident occurred which served to en-

hance the prophet in the eyes of the people to a high degree. King Josiah, moved by the preaching of the prophet, had instituted various reforms throughout the land. Coincident with these reforms a mysterious manuscript was found in one of the cells or chambers of the temple. It was a copy of old laws, supposed by many to have been that book of the Bible which is now called Deuteronomy. Whatever the book was, its discovery was hailed with wonder and delight. Its reading created a widespread and profound sensation. Moved by its powerful words and its gripping appeals the nation accepted the argument of Jeremiah and fell upon its knees and gave its heart to God. What a victory for the prophet was this! What a confirmation of his ministry! What a happy ending to what had seemed an impossibly difficult task!

But was this beautiful repentance on the part of the people as beautiful as it seemed to be? There was one man in the land who knew that it was not. That man was the

prophet Jeremiah. Cancer is not cured by the application of mustard plasters. A nation does not live idolatry and indecency for seventy years and then over night become lily white in purity and holiness again. A man is not reformed until his heart is reformed—no matter how beautifully otherwise he may act and appear. "The soul of all reformation is the reformation of the soul." There never was, there never is and there never can be any other. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" sadly and somewhat sarcastically asks Jeremiah. He asks the question because he knows the hearts of his people, how fickle they are, how they desire a reputation for goodness and the rewards of righteousness and yet how all the while they still hanker after and plan for the pleasures of sin, how in spite of all this beautiful repentance they will soon go back again to their old ways "like the swine to the mire and the dog to his vomit."

The criticism that Jeremiah makes of the mock-repentance of his people is one that needs to be sounded in the ears of professing Christians time after time. How often are we not content to appear good and to do the things that seem good in the eyes of men while in our hearts we are careful to entertain a lurking love for evil! "Lord, make me pure — but not just yet for a while!" Can we not and do we not pray that sacrilegious prayer as easily today as Augustine of old once said that he did? How often do we need to be told that religion and righteousness and repentance are inward things first of all, that the real man is the inner man, that "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he," that "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

Jeremiah tells the people of his day that the heathen who sincerely and devotedly follow after their false gods are more pleasing in the sight of heaven than are those people who know the true God and who refuse to obey His commandments. He tells them

more. There is absolutely no excuse for their disobedience. The bird of passage knoweth the time and the season of its departure and the distant land toward which it flies when the storms of winter come on. In the same way there is inborn in man a yearning, a craving, an instinct, a conscience if you please, which, if rightly used and not abused, will lead his soul to God. What of the man who stifles that yearning and who turns a deaf ear to the Holy Spirit that pleads with his conscience? Jeremiah tells us about that man. He is the murderer of his own soul. He is crucifying himself unto an eternal shame. These old, old truths from the lips of the weeping prophet — are they not the very truths that the human heart with its hankerings after sin and its self-imposed hypocrisies needs to hear again and again and yet again?

III

The prophet Jeremiah deserves a high place in the affections of all Christian people

because of the remarkable similarity of his life to that of our Lord and Savior. The fact is — this similarity is so marked that the person of the man more than the message of the prophecy which he wrote may be regarded as his prophecy of the Savior to come.

Jeremiah may be likened unto Christ first of all in the matter of his life's work. Like Christ he was dedicated even before birth to the work of serving and saving men. Like Christ he lived a life apart, never marrying and never maintaining a home of his own. Like Christ he came unto his own and his own received him not. Like Christ he did the most important part of his work in the city of Jerusalem and thereabout. Like Christ he found his greatest sorrow there. Like Christ he suffered martyrdom at the hands of the very people whom he lived to bless.

Jeremiah is like Christ in the broad aspects of his life's work. He is especially like Him in the content of the message that

he proclaimed. What was the message that Christ brought to those people of His day who had lulled themselves to sleep with the song of their own self-righteousness? What was the message that Christ brought to the religious leaders of His day who had the key of knowledge and who did not use it, who bound the consciences of men with grievous burdens and who were themselves unwilling thus to be bound and restricted? Did not Christ tell them that theirs was the greater condemnation, that the publicans and harlots would enter heaven before they did? Read Jeremiah. Read his denunciations of the church that has played the part of the harlot and of the people who have forgotten their God. Read his words and you will seem to hear in them by anticipation the rolling thunder tones of judgment that afterward came from the lips of Him who stood in the shadow of the temple and spoke in words of wrath, saying: "Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! How can ye escape the damnation of hell!"

Jeremiah is to be compared to Christ in the sacrificial character of his life and death. Jeremiah, like Christ, was a man of intense sympathy. Like Christ he saw the multitude like sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them. As Christ wept at the grave of Lazarus so Jeremiah wept over the death of the righteous king Josiah. As Christ wept over Jerusalem so did Jeremiah weep over the sin and the sorrow of Judah. The tears of Christ were not a sentimental display of weakness. They were followed by a bold entry into the city of Jerusalem, by vigorous preaching in the face of fiercest opposition and by the noblest act of self-sacrifice that this world has ever seen. In the same way the tears of Jeremiah were not a sentimental display of weakness. They were backed up by hard work, by fearless preaching and by noble self-sacrifice in the interest of the welfare of others.

At the end of the ministry of Jeremiah his enemies conspire against him and take him prisoner. What shall they do with him?

Dangerous foes threaten Jerusalem at this time and so for want of a better or perhaps a worse place to put him they leave the prophet in an abandoned well. The 69th psalm is supposed by some students to have been written by Jeremiah after his deliverance, to describe the sufferings that he endured on this occasion. Listen to its heart-rending words! "Save me, O God; for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." What shall we say of the character of the man who endured all this and more in the interest of his Lord when he needed not to have endured it at all? What of this man who might have lived at ease in the tents of wickedness and who chose instead misery, persecution and death that he might save his people from their sins? Shall we not call such a man a true hero? Shall we not strive to give him honor,

belated though that honor may be? Shall we not say that here is one of God's saints of whom the world was not worthy, one whose likeness this selfish world shall not soon see again?

A certain king, so the story goes, once possessed a pet falcon, a bird of unusual intelligence. One day the king was out hunting. Becoming thirsty and finding a small rill that trickled down the slope he slowly filled his cup and then lifted it to his mouth to drink. At once the bird on his shoulder with a flutter of its wings knocked the cup from his hand and spilled its contents on the ground. A second time the king filled the cup and a second time the bird dashed it to the ground. A third time—but this time the anger of the king was aroused. As the bird dashed near he drew his sword and struck it. It fell into the trickling rill. There, beside its dead body lay the decaying and putrefying body of a huge snake — and the king had killed the bird that had prevented him from drinking the water that

seeped through its rotten and poisonous flesh. Too late the king understood. Too late the king gave the bird the appreciation that its sacrifice deserved.

The Christian world has been exceedingly slow to recognize the greatness and goodness of the prophet Jeremiah who gave up all that this life holds dear in order to save his people from the poison of sin. But what if the Christian world is slow to praise its heroes, its saints and its saviors! "The Master praises—what are men!" Some day, like the king who killed his falcon, the world will understand. Some day the world will know that Christ is king and that high among his honored servants is one who was despised by many, ignored by the multitude and done to his death by the best people of his day—even the man Jeremiah. Some day! Some day! God speed the coming of that day when His saints who suffer now in silence and in patience shall receive the crown of glory they deserve.

IV. Ezekiel

EZEKIEL

A YOUNG MAN WHO WAS NOT DISMAYED BY THE OBJECTIONS OF THE WISEACRES OF HIS DAY

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." — EZEKIEL 18, 20-22.

ONE of the commonest causes for people going wrong and doing wrong is their ignorance of the Bible. If some people would only study the Bible and learn the lessons that it teaches they would be both forewarned and forearmed against the sins that destroy men's souls. "My people perish for want of knowledge," declared the prophet of old. Many people today are perishing

for the same reason. Many people are wrecking and ruining their lives for the want of knowledge, for the want of a knowledge of the fundamental laws of life as they are laid down for their guidance in the records of Holy Scripture.

One of the leading educators of our day, in an article on the Bible recently published in one of our magazines, says: "A knowledge of the Bible without a college education is worth far more to a man than a college education without a knowledge of the Bible." What is it that leads this educator to speak thus somewhat disparagingly of the value of the modern college education? The thing wrong with the average college education, as this man plainly indicates it, is its godless, Christless, even irreligious character. To train up young men and women to be wise and skillful in the ways of the world and to fail to teach them that right is right, that the Bible is true and that Christ is God is to omit the one thing needful and to open the door of human life to

seven devils worse than the one that now dwells there. Unless religion can keep abreast of education moral disaster is a certainty. There is no criminal so dangerous to your country as your criminal with a Harvard accent and a counter-signed diploma. Worse than no education is the education that has turned the heart of its possessor away from God. The Bible is a necessity in human life. We must have it, we must teach it, we must live it, we must — or, like Israel of old, our young people will become wise in wickedness and will destroy themselves and us before we know.

One of the least studied and yet one of the most instructive of the books of the Bible for wise people of today is that book written by the prophet Ezekiel. Just how wise are we people today? How much more than our fathers knew do we know about the fundamental laws that govern and regulate human life? The world has moved on since the days of Ezekiel — but how far has it moved on? Has it moved so far that we

dare to neglect and to forget the message that this man brought to the people of his day? We might think so and we often act so, but a little study will serve to convict us of the grossest ignorance and presumption in this matter. Ezekiel may be old and hoary-headed with years and covered with the dust of ages and despised by the best university pedagogues of the day, but his message is as true today and truer than it ever was and we are sadder people and more sinful the less we know about it and the less we live according to it.

I

What is the truth that God gave the world through His prophet Ezekiel, the truth that our universities sometimes neglect to teach us, the truth that we are not beyond learning today? It is essentially a message concerning our responsibility in moral matters, this message first of all that for the unrepenting wrong-doer there is no escape from the consequences of his wrong-doing.

In the year 597 B. C., or thereabout, when the prophet Ezekiel was a young man of perhaps twenty or twenty-five years, a great and terrible disaster overtook the kingdom of Judah in which he lived. Just as God's prophets had warningly declared, the enemies of Judah overwhelmed her and took possession of the land. Some of the best people were carried away into captivity by their captors, the Babylonians. To these captives this sudden turn of affairs was a dreadful blow. Why should they of all people be thus afflicted? Why should they be taken away from the land of promise which the goodness of God had sealed unto them as their very own? How was it that they, the chosen of the Lord, should thus be brought low? Surely it was all a grand mistake. Surely God would intervene with a miracle as He had done before in such cases and would restore them to honor and power again. Thus did these proud, unrepenting Jewish captives argue with themselves as they beheld the walls of their beloved Jeru-

salem fading away in the distance as they turned their faces to the distant land of Babylon, the land of their captivity, the land of their sorrow.

Among these captives who marched away into slavery was the young man Ezekiel. To him God accorded a clear view of all that had transpired and of all that was soon to transpire. It became the duty of Ezekiel to enlighten the minds of those round about him, to tell them the real meaning of their misfortune and to point them to the proper way of their deliverance from it. What was it that Ezekiel told these his questioners? The message that Ezekiel brought these people on this occasion was one that is rarely taught in our universities, one that the wisest among the wise is never too wise to hear again. It was the message that it is not possible for the unrepenting wrong-doer to escape the consequences of his own wrong-going. Said Ezekiel: "You people have lived in iniquity. You have forgotten your God. You have not done His

will. Your misfortune is the result of your disobedience. You talk about deliverance and God performing miracles. I tell you that no such miracle shall be performed at this time. So long as you go your rebellious way you shall stay in slavery. The soul that sinneth it shall die. You have sinned and now you must endure the consequences. You have sown to the wind. Now you must reap the whirlwind." Thus did the youth Ezekiel declare the mind of the Lord to these stiff-necked sinners. Thus did he give them some medicine that was good for what ailed them. Thus did he deliver them a strong lecture on a subject that is rarely taught even in our best universities.

If there is one message among many from out the dim and distant past of Biblical history which the modern man with Harvard accent and the intellectual brow needs to receive and to believe for his present and future good it is this message that it is not possible for the unrepenting wrong-doer to escape the consequences of his wrong-doing.

The laws that rule the moral world may not be as quick-acting as those that prevail in the physical world, but they are every bit as sure and certain. "God does not pay at the end of every week but He does always pay in the end." As surely as arsenic is poison so surely is sin the seed of death. "You think, Mr. Wiseman, that modern science has abolished the curse of sin, that a course in psychology will silence the accusing voice of conscience, that a sweet smile on your face will disarm both the wrath of God against evil and the suspicions that righteous men hold against you. I say to you that your self-confidence and presumption in this matter are exceeded only by your exceeding great ignorance of the fundamental laws that govern and regulate human life. You are more ignorant of the ways of God than those Jewish captives by the rivers of Babylon, weeping and trying to convince themselves that God has made a mistake in sending them into captivity. Will you not look at history and learn that God is not

mocked, that the soul that sinneth it shall surely die, that God is a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Him? Will you not look and learn before His heavy hand of justice shall fall upon you?" It is thus that Ezekiel speaks to stiff-necked sinners of today. It is thus that he prescribes for them the medicine that is good for what ails them. It is thus that he delivers for them a lecture on a subject rarely taught in our best universities.

II

The message of Ezekiel is first of all the simple message that for the unrepenting wrong-doer there is no escape from the consequences of his wrong-doing. It is further a declaration to the effect that each individual shall answer to God for his own faults and follies, that each individual — while he may suffer from — shall not suffer for the faults and follies of his neighbor or ancestor.

The thing that was hard for some of these Jewish captives in Babylon to understand was that apparently many innocent people had suffered most in the destruction of Jerusalem while some of the people who had been most responsible for the sorrows of the nation had gone down in peace to their graves before the grand catastrophe had occurred. "The way of the Lord is not equal," these people complainingly declared. As an expression of their discontent with the judgments of God the proverb became current which said: "Our fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." This unwillingness to accept God's judgments as righteous and fair finds its clearest expression in a remarkable passage in the book of Jeremiah where the people are described as surrounding the prophet and saying: "When our fathers worshiped Baal and the stars things went well with us, but since Josiah served the Lord only things have gone ill." Over-against such arguments — and I think you

will agree that they are strong arguments — what shall our youthful Ezekiel say? To these, the wiseacres, the university lords of his day, what message shall be given?

It is here that Ezekiel comes forward with a declaration that is clear and clean-cut and above all else convincing, a declaration that still stands as the best answer that has ever been given to that difficult question: "Why do the righteous suffer more than the wicked?" What is that answer? Here it is —mark it well! "The righteous do not suffer more than the wicked. They never did. They never will. God is above all things else a God of justice. He is such whether men can see Him so or not. No man shall suffer for the sins of another. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. One man may suffer temporarily because of the sins of another—but never for them. Each man in a

last analysis shall bear his own burden. Each man shall be judged for himself, according to the deeds done in the flesh, whether they be good or whether they be evil. He shall be judged so fairly that he shall be compelled to answer each decree, even the decree that condemns him, and say that it is true and right altogether." Thus does Ezekiel answer these complainers of his day. Thus he gives them some medicine that is good for what ails them. Thus he delivers them a lecture on a subject rarely taught in our best universities.

The reason why these Jewish captives who weep by the rivers of Babylon think that God is unfair is because they see only a small part of his doings. Let them look at history as a whole. Let them remember the sins of the past which have ripened into the sorrows of the present. Let them see the mercy of God that points the way to the kingdom of grace that He has established through His Son, Jesus Christ. Let them look forward to that better day when the

penitent shall be forgiven, when those shall be exalted who suffer now in silence and in patience. Let them see the whole plan and working of God and they will know that no man ever had a truer Friend than the Friend Israel has had in the Lord and that no nation has ever had a fuller, freer salvation than that which came in Jesus Christ, the Lord.

When the battle of Waterloo had been fought the news was conveyed to England by means of semaphore, that is, by the waving of flags from one point of elevation to another. As the first word came to London a fog settled down over the city and the only words received were the words: "Wellington defeated." At once a gloom worse than the fog covered the city. When the fog lifted the rest of the message came through: "Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo today." How the spirit of the city changed when the full message was received. When those who complain about the injustice of God see through the fog of

their own ignorance to read the full message of His love they will not murmur nor will they complain. They will know that glorious truth which Ezekiel once preached, that truth which some of our best universities are reluctant to teach, that God is above all things else fair and true, that His judgments are right rejoicing the heart, that He ever has been and always will be the best Friend that sinning man can ever hope to have.

III

The preaching and teaching of Ezekiel in Babylon are rich in truth and wisdom. It is Ezekiel who tells these captives that they must treat one another as brethren and who thereby builds up in this heathen land a little colony of disciples of brotherly love. It is Ezekiel who pleads with these people to keep their home life pure and clean, a fact that leads some students to give Ezekiel credit for the purity of Jewish home life which has ever been a mark of this people since the breaking up of their nation as a nation. It

is Ezekiel who gives these captives such a glimpse of the future kingdom of God that their hearts are comforted and their hopes sustained throughout the long, weary years of their exile. All these matters are interesting and instructive and worthy of our closer attention. Let us, however, pass them by and devote such time as we have to another thought more closely related to the matter of personal responsibility which Ezekiel elucidates for us. It is this thought — no man shall suffer for the sins of another, but a man shall suffer if he allows his neighbor to go on in sin when with a certain effort on his part this neighbor might be turned from the evil that is destroying him.

Each man is responsible for his own life. At the same time, each man is in a degree responsible for his brother's life. If you are wicked you shall answer to God for your wickedness soon or late. If you are wicked and I, who could do so, do not try to turn you from the error of your way, then I, as

well as you, shall answer to God for your wickedness. Children that are perverse and rebellious shall be punished for their wrong-doing — but woe unto those careless parents who failed to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord — better it were for them that a millstone were hanged about their necks and they were drowned in the depths of the sea. People around me may be godless, vile and unbelieving—but woe is me and woe is you if, having the Law and the Gospel, we do not proclaim to these sinners the whole mind and will of God. "Son of man, I have set thee a watchman over the house of Israel. If the wicked man sin, and thou givest him not warning, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood shall I require at thy hand." Thus does Ezekiel preach moral responsibility for others to stiff-necked sinners. Thus does he give them medicine that is good for what ails them. Thus does he deliver them a

strong lecture on a subject rarely taught in our best universities.

The religion of ancient Israel has been severely criticised in the last days by those who claim that it is narrow, selfish, exclusive and wholly lacking in any social element. People who think that the religion of ancient Israel is all this need to study the book of Ezekiel and to learn how this man makes each man of us responsible for his neighbor's present welfare and future salvation. A modern poet has said:

"Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul
May keep the path but will not reach the goal;
While he who walks in love may wander far,
Yet God will bring him where the blessed are."

A modern poet has written these words, I said. Yes, but the truth they contain were given to the world by a young man named Ezekiel almost six hundred years before Christ was ever born in Bethlehem.

It has been said that the gateway to heaven is very strangely constructed. It is

constructed in such a way that if a man come all alone and try to enter in he shall find its portals too narrow for him to pass. If, however, he come bringing with him his friends and relatives he shall find it wide enough and to spare and St. Peter standing just within to bid him welcome as he enters. This conception of our personal responsibility for the salvation of others is not a new one at all. It is as old as the mind of God. It is as old as the Old Testament. It is as old as the prophet Ezekiel. "Son of man, I have set thee a watchman over the house of Israel. If the wicked man sin and thou givest him not warning, to save his life, the same man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood shall I require at thy hand." Thus does Ezekiel of old speak to the careless hearted of yesterday and today. Thus does he prescribe for lazy Christians the medicine that is good for what ails them. Thus does he give the wise of this world a strong lecture on a subject rarely taught even in our best universities.

V. Daniel

DANIEL

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN WHOSE PROPHETIC WORD IS A BLESSED PROMISE FOR THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." — DANIEL 12, 3.

IT is an exceedingly difficult thing to sum up the message of the prophet Daniel in an address of twenty or thirty minutes. So far as the writings of the Bible are concerned I can think of but one task that is more difficult. That is to sum up the teachings of the book of Revelation in the same way and in the same length of time. The fact in the case is—the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel are considerably alike. Both are filled with mysteries and problems and prophecies that defy interpretation. Both are so symbolical and enig-

matical at times that hearing the teachings of their respective authors as they are here recorded we are inclined to throw up our hands in despair to say of them what the disciples in their ignorance once said of Jesus: "We know not what it is that He saith unto us."

While the book of the prophet Daniel is an exceedingly difficult one to interpret, it is at the same time a good one for us to read and to study. The problem of tomorrow has always exercised a peculiar fascination upon the minds of thinking people and especially upon the minds of those suffering saints of God who seek salvation and glory in the coming of Jesus Christ. Can we find out what the future really has in store? Have God's prophets indicated what will actually come to pass as time moves on and as judgment and eternity loom near? Is the fulfillment of prophecy in the past any guide and assurance as to how their unfulfilled prophecies concerning Christ and His kingdom will ultimately be realized? The book

of Daniel may not answer these questions as explicitly as we would like. At the same time it does answer them. It links its word of mystery so closely with some of the generally accepted facts of ancient history that even the most casual student cannot fail to have some of his doubts removed and his faith strengthened as a result of their study and investigation.

I

The book of Daniel, let us notice by way of introduction to our main line of thought, is one of the most severely criticised of all the books of the Bible by higher critics and by enemies of Biblical orthodoxy. If we accept the book for what it plainly professes to be we will find that it was written by Daniel himself and that the date of its composition falls somewhere in the fifth and sixth centuries before Christ, most likely somewhere during that period when the Jewish people were captive in Babylon. If we accept the book for what its enemies and

critics say of it we will find that it is nothing but a clever forgery ascribed to the Daniel who lived six centuries before Christ, but really written by an unknown author during those terrible days of Jewish tribulation when Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of Syria, desecrated the temple and despoiled Jerusalem, somewhere near the year 165 B. C.

So far as these critical problems are concerned, I have neither the time nor the inclination nor the scholarship to discuss them here with you. If there is any one interested in the conservative opinions which I have in the matter I would recommend that person to Raven's Old Testament Introduction, a careful and conservative book which sums up the best objections of the critics and then proceeds to answer them in very simple but convincing fashion. To study the book of Daniel from the viewpoint of the difficulties that attend its interpretation and composition is to lose yourself in a terrifying maze of contradictory arguments and is

to fail to get the real message of the book very much after the fashion of the man who failed to see the woods because of the trees that surrounded him on every hand.

So far as the critics and enemies of the book are concerned let us simply say this—the bitterness of their attacks is one of the best arguments for the authenticity and spiritual authority of the book. We fight the thing that we fear and we ignore the thing of which we are little afraid. The fact that the critics have singled out this book and loosed the vials of their wrathful scholarship upon it should tell us that here is a foe whom they fear, an enemy whom they dare not ignore. Why should these critics fear Daniel so much? The answer is easy. Some of the predictions of Daniel's prophecies have been fulfilled already and so accurately and minutely that Daniel is clearly attested as God's spokesman and his other prophecies, not yet fulfilled, are given a strong appearance of truth and reality. "We cannot have this," say the unfriendly

critics. "Let us proceed to upset this whole business of prophecy and let us do so by proving to the world that Daniel's fulfilled prophecies were written after the event occurred and not before and that his unfulfilled ones are likewise inventions and not worth the paper they are written on." Thus the unfriendly critics. Granted that their claims against Daniel are true — that his fulfilled prophecies were written after and not before the event — his book, of course, becomes valueless so far as the issues of the church of tomorrow are concerned. Granted that their claims are not true—and we insist that the words of Daniel were written not after but before the event — do you not see how their very bitterness constitutes one of the best compliments for the authenticity and spiritual authority of the book that could possibly be given?

II

Coming to the book itself and inquiring after the message that it brings we will find

that it tells us first of all that God is in human life, that He is very near to those who trust in Him, that He is the hope and salvation of those who lean upon Him.

Daniel is in Babylon, a captive in a strange and hostile land, a follower of the true God in a land where the true God is scarcely known at all. Unlike some people who take their vacations far away from home, he has taken his religion along with him. In spite of great difficulties, royal edicts, petty persecutions and even danger of death, he continues to worship and to pray and to live according to the dictates of his conscience and the teachings of his faith. In the end he gains the victory. Even the lions in the den are not able to harm him and the king upon his throne is compelled to praise his steadfastness and courage. Why is all this called to our attention so vividly in the book? Not merely that Daniel may exalt Daniel in our eyes. These things are told us that we may know that God is in human life, that He is very real and very

near to His true children, that He is the very life and strength and salvation of those that lean upon Him.

The secret of victory over the world is faith in the living God. To know that God is true, to know that He is near, to know that He will deliver us even when the worst has come to the worst and death itself draws near—this is to enter the battle of life with victory already written on our banners. "The door has never been constructed, the dungeon has never been built that can exclude Jehovah from His suffering ones." You may bind a man hand and foot, you may put him in the deepest and darkest prison cell, you may gag his mouth and curtail all his physical activities. You cannot keep the prayer of his soul from rising to God and what is more you cannot keep the help of God from coming down to him. Let the persecuted saint pray on. Let captive Israel hope in the Lord. In due time the unexpected shall happen and the prisoner shall be led forth from darkness into the light to

be crowned with glory and honor. This is the first message of the book of Daniel to those who are weak-kneed and wavering. It is a message of blessed hope for the church of tomorrow in the trials that it will be called upon to endure. It is a message strong and assuring because it comes substantiated by actual experience and by first-hand observation.

A certain printer, it is said, was once called upon to print an article in which the quotation was made which says of Daniel that "he had an excellent spirit in him." Somehow the printer's hand slipped or his mind wandered or he thought too much about Daniel in the lions' den—I know not which. Whatever the trouble was, when the copy was completed it said of Daniel that instead of having "an excellent spirit in him" he had that which was just as good, namely, "an excellent spine."

"An excellent spine," a good, staunch, sturdy backbone such as Daniel did most certainly have, is the inevitable accom-

paniment of "an excellent spirit." A realization of the nearness and goodness of God in human life gives strength and courage to church-members in the hour of trial. The strength of the church of tomorrow is her faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Let the persecuted saint then pray on. Let captive Israel hope in the Lord. In due time they both shall reap of the spiritual harvest if they faint not. This is the first message of the book of Daniel to those in the church whose spines and whose spirits are not all that they should be in the matter of living true to the religion they profess.

III

The book of Daniel would tell us further that God is in history as well as in human experience, that He guides and controls the affairs of the nations, that only one nation shall endure the ravages of time—the nation that has made itself His own by faithful obedience to His commandments.

This declaration from the pen and heart of Daniel comes about in a strange way. It seems that while Daniel was still a young man in Babylon that the king had a dream. When he awoke the next morning he desired to call it to mind again but to his disappointment found that he could not do so. At once he called upon his wise men about the court to find out for him what the dream had been. What are wise men good for if they cannot help us remember the dreams that we forget? When the wise men were about to be done away with for not being able to serve their king in this capacity Daniel steps in. He recalls the dream and he gives the king its interpretation.

The king, it seems, dreamed that he had seen a huge image with a certain likeness to a human figure. Its head was gold, the breast and arms were silver, the belly and the thighs brass, the legs iron and clay. As the king gazed upon this queer figure he saw a rock not hewn with human hands separate itself from its native bed and smite the

image and break it into countless pieces. Then the stone that had smitten the image itself gradually increased in size until it assumed the appearance of a mountain and filled the whole earth.

The interpretation of the dream as Daniel gives it to the king is this: — The head of gold is the kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar, the king, is ruler. The breast of silver, the belly of brass and the legs of clay represent other kingdoms that shall follow after that of Nebuchadnezzar in world dominion. The stone that crushes the image and that fills the earth is the kingdom that God shall establish on the earth, the kingdom of His grace and glory, the kingdom of Christ, the church which shall never pass away. The kings of the earth may be strong but they shall not be able to resist the power of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The kingdoms of this world may be long-lived and enduring but they all shall pass away. The kingdom of Christ in its earthly manifestations may

not have the glory of gold or the brightness of silver or even the sheen of brass, but it shall have the strength of stone. It shall endure where all others shall fail. It shall last forever. This is the message of Daniel to the king concerning the God who marks the sparrow's fall and who is at the same time so mighty that He guides and controls all the issues of life and history. This is the message of Daniel to the church of tomorrow.

The wonderful thing about the message of Daniel is that it is in great part already proven true. God is in history. He does control the destinies of the nations. Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Perish and Rome—where are these today? Gone down into the dust of ruin and decay beneath the power of His mighty hand. What is the one kingdom that has endured through the varying course of history and that has not been destroyed though often persecuted and oppressed and despised of men? Has it not been the kingdom of God's grace established on this earth

through Jesus Christ, His Son? And is there not every indication that as time runs on, as nations rise and wane, that this kingdom shall grow larger and larger and stronger and stronger until like the stone "not hewn with human hands," it shall at last supplant all others and fill the whole earth?

Oliver Wendell Holmes is quoted as having said: "Falsehood gets sick and dies if she so much as scratches her little finger while truth gets well even though she be run over and cut to pieces by a locomotive." The kingdom of Christ in this matter is like the truth of which Holmes speaks. She has been run over by the locomotive of persecution. She has been burned by the fires of this world's hatred and scorn, cut to pieces and chopped into bits by the wickedness and wrath of men — with what result? The mightiest kingdoms of this world have all succumbed to shocks less mighty than these, but she outlives them all. Behold her today, perhaps not all that she should be, by no

means all that she will be, but behold her, none the less alive and active, strong and well, intent on serving her Lord and undaunted by the fiercest trials that may yet arise? What does it all say? Does it not say that the king's dream and Daniel's interpretation are true? Does it not say that God is indeed in history? Does it not verify the claim of the hymn which says:

"Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus
Constant will remain?"

IV

There are many other historical prophecies in the book of Daniel with which we might occupy our minds for many days, prophecies concerning different nations under the figures of the four beasts, prophecies concerning certain periods and epochs of time such as the period of the seventy weeks, prophecies concerning wars and tyrannies and disasters, prophecies concerning

angles whose business and duty it is to care for special interests here on earth. As interesting as a study of these might be let us pass them by for lack of time and more especially for lack of ability to unravel them and let us conclude our thought by noting one thing more concerning this book of Daniel, this general observation that it reveals God not only in human experience, not only in the affairs of history, but finally and most fully by pointing to the person of Jesus Christ.

One of the historical characters plainly referred to in the veiled prophecies of the book of Daniel is that of Alexander the Great. Quite plainly this man is used as a foil to enhance the greatness and the goodness of Him who is both the world's King and Redeemer. How remarkable is the similarity between these two and how much greater does the latter appear when contrasted with the former! Alexander, like Christ, lived to be but little over thirty years —the one died in a drunken debauch while the latter laid down His life for others on

the cross of sacrifice. Alexander in his day conquered the then known world but his kingdom has fallen into decay and is now only a memory in the minds of a few. Christ in His day conquered no city or nation or people by force of arms, yet He established a kingdom that is world-wide and that endures, a kingdom that grows stronger and stronger, a kingdom that men cannot ignore or forget try as hard as they may. Alexander sacrificed the lives of others, thousands and almost millions of them, to exalt and to glorify himself with the result that his work has gone for naught and his name is heartily despised by those who really know the character of the man. Christ sacrificed Himself and not the lives of others. He sacrificed Himself that others might be exalted. Today countless people call His name blessed and honor it above every other name that is given in heaven or on earth. These contrasts are not spoken of directly and immediately in the book of Daniel, yet they are there to be made by those who will.

In the eyes of the world Alexander who ruled the world at thirty is the greatest genius of them all. In the eyes of the inspired prophet Alexander the Great sinks away into utter insignificance before the rising glory of Him who is the Ancient of Days, the Redeemer to come, the Light of men and the Hope of mankind!

A diamond circlet about the neck of a lovely woman is beautiful not only because each diamond is beautiful but because the diamonds taken together form a perfect circlet. If one diamond were missing the beauty of the whole would be both marred and destroyed. In the diamond circlet of prophecy that surrounds the lovely figure of the Christ sent from heaven each diamond is beautiful, Hoseah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. How bright and clear are the rays of light that are shed by these upon the Christ that is to come! If one were missing the others would still be beautiful, but the beauty of the whole would be gone. Thank God that none is missing! Thank

God for the clear testimony that Daniel adds to the word of those who precede him!

In the last chapter of the book of Daniel there is a precious word of promise for those who are members of the kingdom of Christ and who seek the success of the church on earth. It is a good word wherewith to close any discussion concerning the issues of tomorrow. It is a good word for church members and church workers to carry with them as they go forth to serve their Lord. It is a word of precious promise, a word that holds forth a blessed hope. Here it is — mark it well: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever."

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